MATWATCH
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STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS
By Steve Beverly

ATLANTA---"Come on in, Steve, and let me tell you what's happening."

When someone tells me that and isn't grinning from ear-to-ear, I'm suspicious. This time, I was right. Such was the countenance last Monday of one Joe Pedicino when I dropped in on him at WATL in Atlanta.

In less than a minute, Joe delivered the abrupt news: "As of September First, Channel 36 has decided it's dropping all wrestling from the station." I wanted to believe Joe was tired from all of his recent travel, but it was not to be.

If you've only heard of Pedicino through national publications or only seen him on PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK, you may not know how influential Joe has become in wrestling circles in the last three years.

Before PWTW, Joe was an account executive for the Atlanta independent station. He's also an admitted lifelong wrestling fan. WATL was running the Memphis show at 8 a.m. Saturdays and management wondered why it was getting low ratings.

Joe explained wrestling is like any other programming: "It has to be scheduled right and people have to have a reason to care about it."

Soon, Joe became host of a concept called SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING (before the WWF employed the title) that offered at one time as many as eight different wrestling shows in a seven-hour block on WATL Saturday nights.

Joe pioneered the weekend party format. Joe was Everyfan (he still is). He knew the feuds, he had the insider's knowledge of a promotion's direction, and made you feel he was at ringside discussing it with you.

The SUPERSTARS format has been one of the most celebrated concepts and why it isn't more copied around the country can only be explained in that most TV general managers don't grasp the need to find a knowledgeable host to wrap around a package of wrestling shows.

SUPERSTARS began drawing ratings in the 8-9 range for the prime time hours and holding a 4-6 range late-night, numbers most indies would kill for.

"They say now they don't want to be known as 'the wrestling station' any more," Joe told me. "They want to be known as 'the movie station,' yet we're still doing 5 and 6 ratings and our commercial inventory is sold out. You explain that one to me."

In fact, last Saturday's SUPERSTARS doubled its lead-in (FOX's DIRTY DOZEN, a 2.9 rating) with a 5.8 in its first hour at 10. Shares for all four hours ranged from 19-23, excellent even for network affiliates in big cities.

Some fans and industry insiders believe Joe's concept was hurt last summer when his 8-10 p.m. hours were cut to make way for weak Fox programming. Pedicino had benefited hugely from a switchover lead-in of fans watching TBS from 6-8.

Hark, however! Dudley Do-Right is on the way in the form of Atlanta's WVEU Channel 69. Wednesday, TV 69 signed Joe to move SUPERSTARS and PWTW to its channel Sept. 3. He'll reclaim his former 8-3 hours.

"They're paying me and Boni (Blackstone, Joe's co-host) more money, taking care of all production costs, and giving us a percentage of all the advertising," Joe said by phone Wednesday. "Plus, I get 100 per cent creative control, something I didn't always have at 36."

His new lineup: 8 p.m., WORLD CLASS; 9, PWTW; 9:30, MEMPHIS; 10:30, SOUTHERN; 11:30, CONTINENTAL; 12:30 FLAIR (the new ladies' group); 1, USA; 2, WWC.

Outside of Atlanta, you may not see the immediate impact of this story. In my view, there's a major significance...one which supports the contention that wrestling is now in a "deplosion" or declining stage.

Here was a station in the 12th market in the U.S. which had no identity prior to 1985 and road the coattails of the national ring boom. It pioneered one of the most innovative highlight programs in the history of the business. Wrestling gave WATL an identity. Yet, at a point where it is still getting excellent and quite saleable ratings, it no longer wants to be known as "the wrestling station." These decisions in TV are rarely made abruptly. Having worked in the industry, I know many stations won't even move GILLIGAN'S ISLAND without consulting its advertising rep firm. The same for an image change. While it makes no sense to me to drop perhaps your most lucrative financial entity, Outlet Communications, owner of WATL, is in serious financial trouble. My guess is it felt a complete image switch may be a way out of money woes.

In recent weeks, I've heard of some major market stations dropping either WWF SUPERSTARS or one of the NWA shows and not replacing them with other wrestling

(Continued on next page)

inventory in his syndicated shows as in previous months.

We're not on the edge of collapse, but in a subtle meltdown cycle of TV wrestling---something many of us predicted two years ago would result from the glut.

As for Pedicino, he'll be just fine. While he transfers SUPERSTARS and PWTW to an Atlanta station with a weaker signal and poorer cable penetration, his audience will follow him. The station averages less than a 1 rating now and will probably thrive with the 3-4 ratings I predict it will get, once fans find the new address.

"The folks at 69 are rolling out the carpet for us and we're ready to walk in without a break," Joe says. Considering what this guy has accomplished since 1985, I'm betting on Pedicino.

COMINGS & GOINGS

Pedicino's switch to WVEU pretty well sends Jody Hamilton's two-year-old Deep South Wrestling to the electric chair. Ironically, TV 69 had Jody trying to do a head-to-head Saturday night marathon against Joe at one point with DEEP SOUTH, GLOW, GLOBAL and the AWA "B" show. It failed miserably and led to some bad taste lampooning of Pedicino and Boni Blackstone on 69. Lately, Deep South has clung to a weak Monday at 10:30 slot with no talent and virtually no viewers.

	Rating	Households	Time slot
1. NBA Playoffs (WTBS)	4.4	2.001 million	various
2. Award Theatre (WTBS)	3.4	1.527 million	Sunday, 10:35 a.m.
3. Andy Griffith (WTBS)	3.0	1.353 million	Sunday, 9:35 a.m.
4. WWF Prime Time Wrestling (USA)	3.0	1.326 million	Monday, 9 p.m.
5. Beverly Hillbillies (WTBS)	2.9	1.310 million	Sunday afternoon
6. Prime Movie I (WTBS)	2.9	1.295 million	Daily, 8:05 p.m.
7. National Geo. Explorer (WTBS)	2.8	1.272 million	Sunday, 9 p.m.
8. Flintstones (WTBS)	2.8	1.261 million	Sunday, 9:05 a.m.
9. WWF A.M. Wrestling (USA)	2.8	1.253 million	Sunday, noon
10. Brady Bunch (WTBS)	2.7	1.236 million	Weekdays, 4:35 p.m.
11. Championship Sports (WTBS)	2.7	1.212 million	Saturday, 6:05 p.m.
12. Andy Griffith (WTBS)	2.7	1.211 million	Weekdays, 7:35 p.m.
13. Good News (WTBS)	2.6	1.156 million	Sunday, 10:05 a.m.
14. Munsters (WTBS)	2.6	1.146 million	Weekdays, 5:05 p.m.
15. Sanford & Son (WTBS)	2.5	1.137 million	Weekdays, 7:35 p.m.
16. Gunsmoke (CBS)	2.7	1.126 million	Sunday, 4 p.m.
17. Andy Griffith (WTBS)	2.5	1.106 million	Sunday afternoon
18. Sunday Sports (WTBS)	2.4	1.102 million	Sunday, 5:35 p.m.
19. Andy Griffith (WTBS)	2.4	1.098 million	Weekdays, 7:05 p.m.
20. Bewitched (WTBS)	2.4	1.063 million	Weekdays, 8:35 a.m.

Above are the national cable ratings for the second quarter. Good news for the WWF; troubling for TBS and the NWA. This is the first time any WWF show has outpointed the NWA (listed as CHAMPIONSHIP SPORTS and SUNDAY SPORTS for ad packaging reasons) Saturday show and a first that both NWA programs have trailed both WWF cable shows. The Saturday NWA show dropped nearly a full point from its 3.6 in the first quarter...and it's the first time WCW has ever dropped out of the top six. Reasons? Early warmth in the spring was a factor in all network weekend sports dropping in ratings; however, from this end I see two keys: (1) other than the one Tallahassee show, the Windham turn, and Cornette's cake in the face, there was not one compelling episode of WCW during the quarter, and (2) the NWA has simply gone stale. Notice also that NWA MAIN EVENT, at 18th, stayed flat from the 2.4 of the old NWA SUNDAY show.

Speaking of TBS, I'm convinced now the Turner sale is going to go through to the point I won't even report any more until it does. But I have had it on firm authority that for the immediate future, Dusty Rhodes would remain as booker. Bad news. The talk in Atlanta is an $8 million selling price; however, most insiders feel Crockett and Dusty will never last with Turner because they don't fit the TBS mold. If so, good news.

Finally on the NWA, the Saturday show of 7/23 hit a new low in my book. The guys looked tired and the crowd was deader than the WRESTLEMANIA IV mourners. With good reason: the taping was on a Tuesday morning between the Columbus and Macon Bashes. Who the heck goes to a wrestling match on Tuesday morning?

On more pleasant notes, the Continental shows from Birmingham from this past weekend and the one upcoming are two of the hottest I've seen in a year. Pedicino as color man brought out the best in Charlie Platt and the end angle was classic from the pages of the UWF: as new CWF tag champs Shane Douglas and Lord Humongous were being interviewed, they were jumped by Sgt. Bob Carter, Mark Pyle, Detroit Demolition, Alan Martin, and the Samoans. Humongous was tied to the ropes while four of the heels applied a piledriver to Douglas. Jerry Stubbs, Danny Davis, and Willie B. Hert (Pez Whatley) came out and a wild melee ensued. Kinda made you think Jim Ross would show up with his hysterical vocal strains any second.

The other hot angle either proves Eddie Gilbert is a genius or has flipped. He took a pop at Pez's 14-year-old son, which went over so big that the crowd literally was emerging from the seats to go after Eddie. The Fairgrounds arena is in a rough section of Birmingham and it showed after the angle. Charlie Platt told me two days later, "That was one time I was ready to cut the tape and get the heck outta there. I told Joe, 'I've got my gun ready if we have to make a run for it.'" If you get the CWF on FNN, watch for it!

I'm not sure if Verne has had a lobotomy or not, but get this: he's planning a PPV card on Nov. 6, which he originally wanted on Election Night. The only match signed is Meduca Miceli vs. Magnificent Mimi (yeah, I might pay 59 cents for that one). Gilbert allegedly has agreed to work the card but nobody at Continental or any of the other associations want to talk openly about this one because I detect a strong feeling---including my own---that this one won't fly. No committment from the PPV companies yet either.

PROMOTER'S PROFILE: WWC

I suppose the question most posed from a business standpoint in the wake of the Bruiser Brody tragedy is: what's going to happen to the World Wrestling Council? Can it survive? Will American wrestlers continue to make the trek to Puerto Rico?

In the early days after the Brody death, I spoke with several people who had been in contact with Dutch Mantel, Tony Atlas and Sika, three of whom had been in the Carribean for the ill-fated Saturday night show. Aside from the shock factor, there was extreme bitterness---particularly from Sika, who was threatening assorted exposes when he returned to the CWF.

Buck Robley, one of Brody's closest friends in the industry, is said to have organized an ad hoc American boycott of the WWC promotion. Dick Slater, who has been perpetually on the edge in many promotions, is no longer working with Jerry Blackwell's Southern group, in part---according to one source---because he hopped a plane with the intention of going to San Juan; an intention Joe Pedicino says was not carried out by Slater.

In addition, Danny Spivey vowed initially never to work for Carlos Colon again, though he may change his stand. Spivey was just beginning to blossom as a heel to the degree he never could as an attempted WWF Barry Windham clone....and with the state of U.S. promotions today, one cannot immediately forecast Spivey's continental options, which may alter his stance.

As the situation has evolved, Mark and Chris Youngblood are staying with the WWC as is Bobby Jaggers from the American contingent and Jaggers is particularlry working to help Colon overcome the tarnish from Brody's killing. Pedicino says he believes Abdullah the Butcher will probably return after a respite.

One source I talked with believes in the short run Colon is going to be an open target for people who have been out to wreck his business even before the incident. Personally, though Robley is serious about his boycott, I don't believe it can have any lasting effect because wrestlers have never been able to unionize, strike, or exercise the kind of power as a group that Brody did as an individual.

I am told the planned supercard in early September which was scheduled for a live telecast on FNN/SCORE had been aborted before the Brody tragedy because of a breakdown in financial negotiations between FNN and the WWC.

Since Colon does not have the same unique pressures as stateside promotions, his biggest challenge is going to be in image-cultivating, a resynthesis of confidence. That's going to take more than a few months because of the intensity of bitterness which exists among Brody's friends.

But will the WWC survive? Certainly...but the quality of its survival lies, as it does in any business, with the quality of people who manage it and their ability to build confidence in their workers and customers. Most rational observers believe Colon can and will.

NWA UPDATE

CrockettWatch has become the grappling pastime since the proposed sale of JCP to Ted Turner was first announced. But the news of the past week appears as grim for the organization as any I have heard. This, despite huge gates across most of the country for The Great American Bash. Let me briefly run down what I have tracked down from a variety of sources over the weekend:

---At a meeting the wrestlers asked for with Jim in Savannah last Monday, Crockett told them, according to one source, that he was "broke" and others say he announced he would not soon be able to meet their balloon payments. The NWA wrestlers were said to have been given the right to negotiate with any group they please, but Crockett told them if they stayed, they would probably be satisfied and acknowledged a sale was in the works.

---Crockett's efforts apparently did not help morale. Robert Gibson quit the NWA again and most expect Ricky Morton to soon follow. Many of the group's name wrestlers failed to show for an 80-minute studio taping at TBS Tuesday morning for WCW.

---There has been talk of an en masse revolt by at least a dozen wrestlers with Aug. 7 (Sunday) being the target date.

---The PPV figures are apparently well below the 3.75% TBS is quoting...closer to the 2% range. Titan is even telling some industry insiders 1.5%.

---Earlier, Dave Meltzer reported on Ole Anderson's attempted interjection into the negotiations with Turner. Now, a new name has entered the fray: Bill Watts. Crockett is said to be at least two months behind on his payments to Watts for the UWF. One source says Crockett has not returned Watts' recent phone calls and Watts allegedly told a JCP insider, "You can tell Jimmy to either talk to me on the phone or I'll talk to him in court." We're told Watts really doesn't want to return to the grappling game, but may reconsider if Crockett doesn't pay off.

---One report I can't confirm is that TBS has loaned Crockett a six-figure amount to hold off his creditors and the loan is a short-term one.

What is clear is that Crockett is in deeper trouble than anyone imagined and is also in danger of losing a substantial part of his TV network. If the NWA is to avoid collapse, which I feel would be dreadful for the overall industry competitively, Turner needs to move fast to avoid what appears to be a serious threat of walkout. We'll update the situation in STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS next week.

TV TEMPO (Weekend of July 29-31)

This week, we begin rating the shows BOMB, FAIR, GOOD, EXCELLENT, and the very rarely issued PINFALL for a MUST SEE episode:

(SOUTHERN) - Batten Twins d. Gerald Finley/Paul Diamond (not the AWA tagger); M.E.B (Man-Eating Beast) d. Chuck Allen; Mr. Wrestling II d. Buddy Michaels (Robley & Moondog double attack II and try to unmask him until several faces save); M.O.D. Squad d. Akio Sato/Curtis Thompson. Plus, video tribute to Brody. FAIR.

(CWF) - Tom Prichard d. Turbo Ted; Willie B. Hert d. Lee Peek; a "$25 fine" announced on Eddie Gilbert & Paul E. Dangerously for misconduct; Lord Humongous/Shane Douglas win the CWF tag team title from Sgt. Bob Carter/Mark Pyle (subbing for Detroit Demolition); Rick Hazzard d. Nightmare Freddie by DQ after Ken Wayne's run-in (Danny Davis saves with 2x4); Tony Anthony d. Mike Starr. Angles: Pez's son pops Dangerously after Pez (Willie B.) was insulted and Gilbert retaliates on the teenager...Willie B. runs out with shower soap suds and Pedicino has to hold off an angry fan; the 6-on-2 attack on Douglas/Humongous at the end. EXCELLENT...might have been a PINFALL if the lighting had been better.

(NWA) - TBS: B. Windham/R. Garvin d. Dale Lapyrouse/Tommy Angel; Arn & Tully d. Trent Knight/J.C. Wilde; Sting d. Rick Allen and other squashes; arena clip of Dusty's attack on Gary Hart. FAIR; NWA PRO: Squashes from Columbus GA including Midnights over Larry Stephens/Knight; ringside heat between Midnights & Tully & Arn where Lane calls Tully a "piece of garbage." FAIR 1/2; MAIN EVENT: Bobby Eaton d. Tommy Rogers when Cornette uses racket; Nikita Koloff d. Tiger Conway; Sting wins DQ over Mike Rotunda in TV title match. GOOD.

(USA) - Arena clip: Doug Furnas winning USA heavyweight title in 7/4 tournament; Wendall Cooley challenges Buddy Landel to hair vs. hair match; interview with Jerry Lawler concerning upcoming matches with Cooley and Bullet (Bob Armstrong). GOOD.

(WWF) - SUPERSTARS: All squashes plus announcement of Hogan as Savage's partner vs. DiBiase-Andre at Summer Slam '88. FAIR 1/2; CHALLENGE: British Bulldogs d. Conquistadors; Demolition d. Sam Houston/J.T. Thomas and other squashes; Brother Love with Andre/DiBiase. FAIR. Full card announced for Summer Slam '88 on 8/29.

(AWA) - Soldad Ustinov d. Greg Robertson; Paul/Rice d. Dennis Stamp/Hunter Thompson; Pat Tanaka d. TNT Greenway; Baron Von Raschke d. Kevin Collins; Medusa Miceli retains AWA women's title vs. Brandi Mae. BOMB.

(WORLD CLASS) - Iceman Parsons d. Bob Bradley; Steve Cox/Michael Hayes attack Fatu; Jimmy Jack Funk d. Tom Jones; Sanu d. Mike Morrow; Kerry Von Erich wins DQ over Kamala when Buddy Roberts and Parsons run-in; Eric Embry d. Steve Casey in finals of light heavyweight tournament. GOOD.

(PWTW) - Tribute to Bruiser Brody: matches vs. Abdullah the Butcher, Sean Cody, from WWC, and a tag match with Tommy Rich as partner; an attack by Dick Slater on Brody; an angle where Brody kisses Dangerously; remembrances by Wrestling II, Rick Stewart, Rich, Robley, and Jerry Blackwell; a video memorial; and clips of a recent Brody interview with Pedicino. PINFALL! While I'd like to have seen a couple of Japan clips, this is definitely a trader's and collector's item. The moments when Blackwell breaks up emotionally humanize the men in this profession more than anything I've ever seen.

LINES OF THE WEEK - 1. Harvey Martin, World Class, on Buddy Roberts: "It's hard to find something good to say about a guy who calls his mother collect on Mother's Day; 2. Pedicino, CWF: "Lord Humongous is being chained to the ropes like Samson was chained to the pillars."; 3. Arn Anderson, WCW, on Jim Cornette: "Your suits look like Stevie Wonder put 'em together for you."; 4. Dangerously, CWF (after impersonations of Rhodes and Piper): "I'm a comedic genius...do you know that?" 5. Robley, PWTW: "Bruiser, I'll be up there with you someday, too."

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MATWATCH SHOPPERS NETWORK

Glenn Fox, 432 Dewey Place East, Seattle WA 98112, has a great list of British videos for sale for $10 each. The quality is first-rate and one includes Owen Hart.

Joe Schmidt, 5718 N. Wayne Ave., Chicago IL 60660, is interested in swapping for Memphis, Global, and independents. He offers most of the major shows, along with NWF and Windy City.

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July 29, 1988

Dear Michael :

I'm sorry this can't be as personal as I'd like it to be, but we've been extremely fortunate to get a batch of new subscribers this past week and I can't write everyone individually.

Glad to have you aboard the MATWATCH network. You'll find we're not THE OBSERVER, but we don't intend to be. Our friend Meltzer is the best in the business at his trade. What we try to be is a forum---for me and you to speak our minds on the issues affecting an industry we all love but we also are highly critical of in its focus and direction.

Weekly, I have a column, STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS, in which I deal with an issue in the industry. You'll find we are heavily dosed toward pro wrestling's use and abuse of television, which is my specialty field. I'm 34, head of the Radio-Television Service at Auburn University, 20 years a broadcaster, a former television news director, and deep at work on a graduate degree. Add to that being 23 years an unabashed wrestling fan.

We do provide news notes in our COMINGS & GOINGS section and you'll find we offer vignettes on the various promotions' TV situations.

As a change of pace, three times a month, our PROMOTER'S PROFILE takes an up close look at the status of a particular promotion, bad and good; and I REMEMBER.... goes through the time tunnel to recall a past angle, feud, match, or TV situation.

Once a month, we offer YOU SAID IT...., a chance for you to air your tonsils on any wrestling issue (including my opinions) within the bounds of good taste--and I heartily encourage and solicit your views. Also, YOU ASKED FOR IT..., which is a chance for you to pose questions to us and we'll try to have a precise answer.

And we wind up every week with TV TEMPO, a recap of the nation's key syndicated shows (we're still trying to get results out of Portland and Stampede, but the tape delay periods are creating havoc for us).

Your first issue is complimentary for joining with us. Your subscription period initially ends SEPT. 26-OCT. 2. You'll be reminded two weeks in advance. If you renew, for the time being, please send the checks or money orders to me personally, not to MATWATCH. Also, my standing offer is for every subscription of 2 months I get as a direct reference and recommendation from you (the new subscriber has to name you by name), you receive two additional weeks free.

I'm glad you're on board and I hope you find we can share some critical views on TV and pro wrestling. No dissenting views are unwelcome here.

Happy MATWATCHing,

Steve

Steve Beverly, Editor